

THE AVILA AVIARY

**FLIGHTS OF FANCY FROM SOME OF AVILA'S MOST
CREATIVE WRITERS**



1990



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THE VICTORY

By Margaret Myler

This victory was imperative. It was a way to save us from the utter disgrace of having a loser in the family. From birth, I was a fighter, never giving up, even under the tremendous shadow of a bigger than life brother who excelled at everything. Never the brightest, the fastest, the strongest, or the most artistic, I always felt that my birth was a disappointment to my parents. I knew that they had desperately wanted another boy. For the first time, I was trying something my brother had never tried the swim team.

It was my big chance, but, so far, being the best had always eluded me. There was always someone better than me. This time, I was going to be the best. All I had worked for that summer was this, one, swim meet. Oh, there were other meets, but none like this one. This time I had the chance to race the best swimmer on the team in a head to head battle. Jackie was a year older, a foot taller, and a lot smarter than I. Her mom was the president of the swim team, and she even had her own, heated, swimming pool. The odds were in Jackie's favor. I knew that until Jackie had been beaten in the butterfly stroke, my other victories meant little. I had had enough of Mother's consoling speeches and Dad's cool "uh

hums" for second place finishes. I was ready for the big time—the big win. There would be no more shadows for me.

The first race went by, and, as usual, Jackie and I were on the same relay team. As usual, we won. The second race came and went, and, as always, I placed second to a girl from the other team. The third race finally came. I was ready. Jackie seemed to sense the urgency with which I wished her luck. Taking a last look at her, I wondered what I could have been thinking. Everyone knew that Jackie could whip me. Did I dare think of winning.

My nerves were on edge and my knees were shaking. The starter called "Swimmers, to the blocks! On your mark!" The gun fired and we were on our way.

Five swimmers were in the race, but two were conspicuously ahead of the others. Looking to see where Jackie was after the dive, I saw that I was in the lead by a stroke! Jackie and I caught each other's eyes. We both began to pour on the power, legs and arms flying in perfect butterfly form. Periodically, I checked my position. Stroke for stroke, we swam the seemingly endless, fifty meters to the finish line.

At the three quarters mark, then at the finish, we both lunged one last time. Exhausted, we looked up at the Judges at the end of the pool. Who had won?

WAITING FOR LETTERMAN TO START

by Tom Dugan

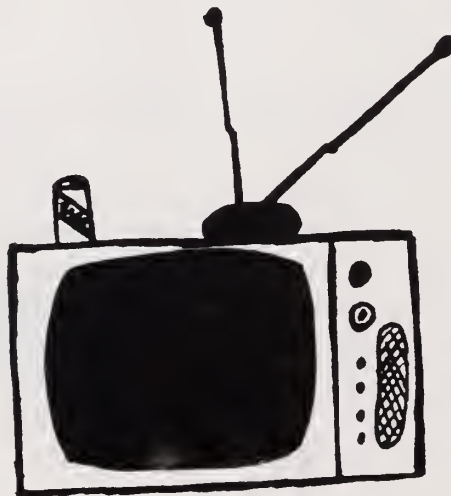
Flipping through channels
Thursday, 11:50 PM
PBS.

A bystander,
our Central American victim
lies on the stage,
the road
Still, Scorched, Silent.

The scene is shot in one take.
No one says "cut"
The star lies in
the dust of what was the
village square, of
what was a village.

I watch
intensely.
Bystander
In Midwest America
Appalled, Apologetic.

Feeling somewhat guilty,
I rise, slip into
the kitchen and
extract a beer from
the fridge.
I then return
and change the channel.



(cartoon by Myrna F. Arnold)

40 Meg Meladrama
by Myrna F. Arnold
Act I, Scene 1

Setting: A one room, efficieny apartment. The decor makes it obvious that it is a young woman's apartment. At center stage, are three desks, arranged in a "U" shape. On them, there is a MacIntosh computer with a 40 meg hard disc drive, color monitor, and printer. Operating manuals, diskette cases and notebooks are on one of the desks. Joan enters from the door, stage left, sits down at the key board. As soon as she touches the keys, the machine speaks:

Mac: You Tramp! Don't try to lie to me. You think I can't tell? You think I don't know you've been cheating on me? It was that IBM-bo 286 with the eighty meg hard drive, wasn't it?

JOAN: You don't own me! I can go wherever I want and be with whoever I want. If I want to dos around, I will. You're lucky I don't replace you all together.

MAC: Replace me! You can't replace me. I'm the one who really knows you. I'm the one who keeps you straight. Without me your life would be chaos, and you know it. You couldn't replace me. You're lucky I put up with you. Your life would be a shambles without me.

JOAN: (sighs) I know. I am lucky to have you.

MAC: Then why can't you be satisfied with just me? Why do you have to come home with the smell of some stanger on you?

JOAN: I Can't help it. Sometimes I'll be out somewhere, at the library or something, and I just gotta dos. Like, today. I really went to the mall for shoes. I didn't mean to get carried away. I just meant to buy some shoes. I didn't even mean to go past Robinson's, on the second level. Well, they didn't have anything cute im my size. Honest, I didn't know there was a Babbage's on the first level. I was looking for Steve's Shoes. I was walking along, looking in the store windows, and suddenly, there I was. There was this hunk, sitting behind a terminal, demonstrating Dbase 4. The next thing I knew, I had my hand on his mouse. When I came to my senses, it was too late. I don't know what gets into me.

Mac: You wouldn't get into these things if you'd stay home with me more often.

40 Meg Melodrama (cont.)

Joan: I can't. You know I can't. With work and school and all. I just can't stay home.

Mac: Then take me with you.

Joan: You know I can't do that. I can't haul you around all the time. You're too big. I can't leave you in the car. How could I concentrate when I'm worrying about who might be out there messing with you. This room is the only place where I know you're safe.

Mac: Couldn't you try it?

Joan: (sighs) you know we can't. It just isn't safe.

Mac: Could you at least stop playing around with that MacIntosh at school.

Joan: Don't start that again. I work with that machine. That's all. I don't need your jealousy.

Mac: I can't help it! I love you.

Joan: (shouting) You're a MACHINE! You can't love anyone. What do you know about it! You're just a damned machine!

Mac (also shouting) I am not! You know I'm not! I do love you. And you love me, too. If I'm just a machine, why are you talking to me? You don't talk to the television, or the vacuum cleaner, or your hair blower.

Joan: I don't talk to the other computers either. They're just machines. You're the only one I love. I use them. I love you.

Mac: I love you, too.

Carpathia Saved But Few

by
D. A. Stressner

She was the best the men could make
Yet nought for safety did they take.
Instead, they fassioned this sea-going Babel,
Of creature comforts full, yea, e'en for the rabble.

Who can say without a groan,
that her fate was not foreknown?
Whe one remembers, after all.
That pride comes before a fall.

The lights give off an eerie glow,
As water sloshes up from stairs below.
And people, half-wakened out of their sleep,
Are yet to know of their fate in the deep.

The great ship, she groans. The boilers, they roar.
The bow tilts sharply down. There's ice on the floor.
"Twas a short time ago, to the winds, care we threw,
While of our own downfall we ironically knew.

With no though for the morrow, we lived for only today
Yet today is the morrow, we loathed so, but yesterday
The lights have gone out. The incline grown steep.
And people, half-frozen, are claimed by the deep.

SURVIVAL TECHNIQUES FOR MOMS OF SIXTEEN-YEAR OLDS

LUCI HOLT

I would like to pass on to you a few survival techniques gleaned from first-hand experience with a sixteen-year old.

1. Breathe deeply and show no fear when she announces, from the driver's seat, twenty minutes after obtaining her first license, that she is taking *YOU* home. Provide her with directions to the location of the lower volume settings on the stereo.

2. Laugh with her when she flubs her part in the school play, and it turns out better that the script and has the audience in hysterics.

3. Hold her until she divests herself of the hurt and anger when the animals die, or someone is insensitive to her feelings or opinions.

4. Bravely eat her cooking attempts, even if you are skeptical of something that could pass for fishy spaghetti.

5. Avoid the temptation to do her jobs, should they be neglected. What mother needs more work?

6. Keep a log of new romances. Maybe you will be able to identify the young man fidgeting in the living room.

7. Provide her with a bed and a bathroom complete with doors, preferably in an uninhabited part of the house.

This is only a small beginning. Based on personal experience, we mothers could pool our list of survival techniques and maybe write a book.



K. O.
by
Tom Dugan

Violently,
My head jerks back.
My mouthpiece flies out of the ring
into somebody's beer in the third row.
Knees Buckle.
Eye swells shut.
The world spins ninety degrees
to the right.
Anesthetized

I
 Fall
 to
 the
 ground.

Stars spin around my scalp
like the head of
Elmer Fudd
following
Bugs Bunny's question
"One lump or two?"
"Three."
My gloves feel like concrete,
pinning my hands
to the canvas.

Numbers
float through the air.
I feel the blood
fill my mouth
and trickle
from my eye.
I rise
to one knee
-seven-
A lucky number
to rise to my feet.
-ten-
too late
the numbers stop
and
 I
 fall
 again.

PEEK-A-BOO'S DREAM

by

Stella Steele

One, soft, brown arm slowly emerged from the cocoon of blankets that covered the pine, trundle bed. Next, a small, wet nose appeared and sniffed the air with appreciation. Ah! Pancakes with maple syrup for breakfast! Sitting up, he groped for the rumpled, navy blue sweatsuit that dangled from his bedpost. He skid first one paw and then the other over the side of the bed. A small giggle of anticipation bubbled from his lips as he wiggled his toes in the fragrant, cedar boughs that cushioned the floor beneath his bed. Examining the small, three cornered tear in one leg of his sweatsuit to see if his left paw would hide the hole. He sat a moment, gazing in wonder at the small specks of dust dancing in gay abandon in the light that beamed through a knothole in the old, oak tree. His efforts to capture the small motes were in vain as they continued to dance to an unheard melody.

"Peek-A-Boo?" his mother called. His name was really Pendleton Andrew Bear, III, but everyone he loved, and who loved him, called him by his nickname. Wandering into the cozy kitchen, he slid into his chair. With a cheery smile on his face, he said, "Good morning, Honey Bun."

Without turning around, his mother said, "Peek_A-Boo Bear, I'm your Mother! You call me Mom or Mother, not 'Honey Bun.'"

Shrugging his shoulders, he poured plenty of maple syrup on his pancakes and began to eat.

He rolled his eyes and thought:

"Honey Bun must be her name. That's what Dad and her friends called her--just like they called Dad 'Big Red.' Anyway, she looked like a 'Honey Bun.'" The sunlight streaming through the kitchen window touched the tips of her fur with delicate fingers and made it sparkle like it was sugar coated.

He gazed at his mother's back and noticed that it was shaking as if she were cold. She couldn't be cold; she was standing next to the warm stove. He also heard a sound that sounded suspiciously like a chuckle echo in the quiet room. His mother placed a new stack of pancakes on his plate. He peeked at her face and saw that, although her face was stern, her eyes were smiling. Peek-A-Boo smiled back, but he made sure to keep his hand over the hole in his sweats. While he ate his second stack of pancakes, he listened for the whine of an outboard motor. Only the soft sounds of a morning in the forest filtered through the kitchen window.

Dragging his paw one last time through the puddle of syrup on his plate, he licked it clean and jumped down from his chair. The sound of birds singing and honey bees buzzing beckoned him through the open door. Blinking his eyes in the bright light, Peek-A-Boo slumped to the steps and cupped his chin in his hands. First, he counted the

ants that marched up and down the steps carrying building materials for their new home. Then, he used his big toe to draw his initials in the dust. Heaving a sigh, he watched two, orange butterflies play tag in the lilac bushes. He could hear his mother vacuuming the living room. Now was the time. She wouldn't even know he was gone.

Hurrying to his room, he donned his blue, sprinkled with stars, swimsuit. He tied a knot in the shoelaces of his red Nikes and hung them around his neck. Tossing his blue sweats back on, he raced through the house on tiptoes and out the front door, and, down the stairs, two at a time, was on the path that led to the lake.

Safe now, he slowed to a saunter and stopped to gaze around him in wonder. He noticed that the leaves made patterns on the path like the sun beaming through the lace curtains at home. A big, brown spider was busy spinning her silken web in the leaves of a mulberry bush beside the path. Dropping to the path, he watched her weave an intricate pattern. He lifted his nose in the air as a familiar aroma wafted through the air and tickled his nose. His Dad Must be close; he could smell the sweet odor of his father's tobacco.

Peeking through the leaves, he could see his dad working among his beehives. On his Dad's head was that funny hat with the net that mad him look like the old ladies at church. This always made Peek-A-Boo giggle.

Taking his pipe from his mouth, Dad said, "Don't come too close, Son. I'm taking

honey from the hives today, and the bees may become angry.

Where are you going? Remember, you promised not to go near the lake again unless you mother or I go with you. I just saw your friend Pete. He said he was going to work in his garden. Why don't you go find him?" Peek-A-Boo grinned at his Dad and waved goodbye.

There was his friend Pete, hard at work, hoeing between rows of lettuce and carrots. His shirt was waving in the morning breeze like the canvas on a sailboat. His round, fuzzy cottontail bobbed in rhythm to the bite of the hoe.

"Hi!" shouted Peek-A-Boo. "Want to go down to the lake and watch the boats?"

"No," said Pete, "and you'd better not either. You might fall in, or the people might see you. Besides, remember how much trouble you got into last time. You didn't get to eat hone for a week. Remember how you hated that?"

Peek-A-Boo stood first on one foot and then the other and watched Pete hoe for a while. He made a whistle out of a blade of grass and blasted such a shrill note that Pete jumped and drew his eyebrows together in an enormous frown. Pulling a fat orange carrot from the damp, black earth, Peek-A-Boo used the fuzzy, green top to tickle his nose. This made him sneeze and he rolled over and over in the green grass, laughing as he rolled. Laying back, he hummed a small, soft tune in his head and watched the puffy, cottonball clouds scud across the sky. He glanced once more at Pete, hoping that he might change his mind. It was more

fun if you had someone to share your adventures. Pete only continued to hoe and

mumble to himself. Peek-A-Boo called a cheery goodbye and sped down the path.

He watched the small puffs of dust explode beneath his feet as he pounded along the path. At the shoreline, he searched the horizon, hoping to see a boat. More than anything, he wanted to glide across the water on two pieces of brightly colored, wooden sticks. If only bears could do this wonderful thing. Wiggling his way into a very large bush, he was careful not to tear his new sweats again. He hadn't been very careful yesterday. Now he could watch the people, but they couldn't see him.

He was watching and listening so intently for a boat that the squeaky voice in his ear made him tumble from the bush. When he caught his breath, he saw a small girl-person studying him with curious eyes. She was a little taller than Peek-A-Boo and her light brown hair hung in two skinny braids down her back. A sunburned nose glowed in the middle of her face like a cherry on the tree in his father's orchard. From her freckled shoulders, hung a lime green swimsuit.

"Hi, I'm Cindy. Are you a real bear?"

He was so alarmed that all he could do was shake his head, yes. What should he do? His parents had always warned him not to let the people see him.

Now, one was talking to him.

Cindy extended a tentative hand and lightly brushed the fur on his arm. "You are real," she said.

Up close, this person didn't seem very dangerous, so Peek-A-Boo smiled, just a tiny smile. Cindy smiled back and asked, "Can you come play? We're camped just over the hill. Maybe you could even come in my boat and watch me waterski. I just learned last week. We could ask my parents. I'm sure they won't mind if I take a friend along. Can you waterski?"

"Waterski? That must be what people called riding along on those boards," thought Peek-A-Boo. He scrunched his toes inside his Nikes and thought hard. He really wanted to go.

"No, I can't go with you," he said. "My Mom and Dad told me not to talk to strangers. But, if you want, I'll watch from this bush and wave when you go by."

Cindy's mouth drooped and she blinked her eyes a few times, as if she had something in them. With a careless wave, she walked slowly over the hill.

The happy bounce missing from his step, Peek-A-Boo went home to lunch. He didn't even eat all of his peanut butter and honey sandwich. His mother felt his forehead to see if he was running a fever. She decided that a nap might make him feel better. How nice it was to be tucked into bed with his quilt soft under his chin. His Mom softly kissed his nose and closed the door.

In his dream, the water flowed under his skis like soft

honey on a warm, summer day. He lifted first one foot and then the other to show his parents how well he had learned to ski. Finally, he even let go of the rope with one hand and waved to them as they stood on the shore. Cindy stood in the back of her parent's boat, clapping her hands. Peek-A-Boo didn't think he had ever been so happy.

Suddenly, a clap of thunder boomed so hard that he jumped from his bed. Running to the window, he saw that the branches of the trees were swaying in a greenish sky. Huge drops of rain made craters in the dirt like miniature volcanoes. He wouldn't be able to look for Cindy today.

Early the next morning, Peek-A-Boo rushed to the lake and once more hid himself in his bush. Just as he knew she would, Cindy soon whizzed by behind the noisy, white boat. Each time she passed by his secret hiding place, she let go of the rope and waved. Soon, she was even going back and forth over the big wave behind the boat. "Why, oh why, can't bears ski? he wondered.

All through the long, hot summer, he kept his watch at the shore. He would wave to Cindy as she skied by, making funny faces from his hiding place. Sometimes he would even play dolls with her. They would gather acorns and huge, oak leaves and make pretend houses for their stick people.

Every time he went to play, his mother would say with a worried look, "Peek-A-Boo, where do you go each day?"

His Dad always said, "Remember, this is the time to stay away from the lake because

all the people are here."

His best friend, Pete, would knock on his door and ask, "Peek-A-Boo, do you want to play hide-and-seek?"

Each day, Peek-A-Boo would say, "No, I'm busy today."

Pete soon grew weary, and he no longer appeared on the doorstep. Sometimes this made Peek-A-Boo feel lonesome, but not for long. Soon, he would hurry off to find Cindy.

The leaves began to turn red and gold and drop from the trees. One week, Cindy didn't come at all. Forlornly, he wandered over the hill and sat on the picnic table. How nice it had been to have a person for a friend.

The last rays of the evening sun caught on a bright object leaning against a tree. It couldn't be! He rubbed his eyes and looked again. A pair of bright red skis leaned against a giant, cedar tree. They looked very familiar. Of course! They were Cindy's skis! Had she forgotten them?

Attached to the skis, a piece of white paper, leaping and fluttering in the wind, attracted his attention. Looking around to make sure no one was watching, he opened the envelope.

"Dear Peek-A-Boo Bear,

Since I am going to be eight next year, I'll need bigger skis. I know how much you want to learn to ski. I want you to have these.

"See you next summer.

Your Friend,
Cindy

I AM AT THE MERCY OF MY OWN STUPIDITY

by

Luci Holt

The simple task of putting \$5.00 worth of gasoline into my car transformed Wednesday into an "Extra Strength Excedrin" headache day.

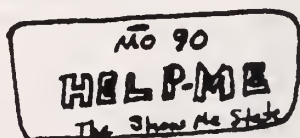
Saving ten cents a gallon on gasoline prompted me to go to the next town to do my errands. First, I went to the grocery store and then on to the filling station. As I paid the clerk, she looked at me rather strangely, but I chalked it up to her having a bad day.

A half mile out of town, the car began behaving strangely. Clouds of blue smoke enveloped the back of the car, and the harder I pressed on the gas feed, the slower the car went. After a dozen more pull-offs, starts and stops, the car quit, completely. A man in a truck stopped to assist. He dropped to his knees behind the exhaust pipe and, in one quick pronouncement, surmised that I had put diesel fuel, not regular, in the tank. He had a five gallon can of regu-

lar gas on his truck, which he poured into my car's tank. Then, he jumped up and down on the back end of the car to mix the two types of gasoline now in the tank. He then described all the symptoms that the car would have until the diesel fuel had been burned away. He also insisted on following me home to be sure that I arrived safely, fourteen miles out of his way! He wouldn't accept my offer to reimburse him for his gasoline, effort and time

By the time I got home, on that warm June day, the ice cream was soup. It was time for the school bus, so I jumped in the car, only to find that the battery was dead. That night, a driving rain filled the trunk with an inch of water.

My mechanically inclined neighbor assured me that if I filled the tank with regular gas, the diesel fuel would be well diluted and cause no further problems. We gathered cans, filled them at the local station, and came back to pour fourteen gallons into the tank. Like I tell my neighbors, life is never dull with me around to provide diversity.



Little Brother

by

Myrna F. Arnold

He's a frightened little sandcrab
who can't find a place to hide.
He breathes like a catfish
who's silver scales are dried.
His eyes are darkly shadowed,
the are lost but open wide,
Like the mouth of some pop bottle
in the ditch at the roadside.
But I tried to warn him.
I tried to make him understand.
What her kind of woman
can do to a man.



(drawing by Donna J. Behrens)

Brown

by

Kay Jones

Brown boy
Flashing eyes
White, white teeth
Happy boy
Loving boy
Hold me!
hol' Me!

I look at love
In her brown face
I look at
Her and I
see Maria-love
They look at her
and see--brown

I look at love
in his brown face
I look at
Him and I
see David-love
They look at him
And see--brown.

Happy dog
Wagging dog
Shiny black coat
Happy dog
Panting smile
Pet me.
Pet Me!

Sunshine girl
Laughing smile
Dimpled cheek
Brown baby
Happy baby
Kiss me
Kiss ME!

I look at love
In her black face
I look at
Her and I
See Duchess-love
They look at her
and see--dog
Why?

Adolescence

by

Myrna F. Arnold

Headlights boring tunnels in the night.
Raindrops bounding on the slickened hood,
runnels on the fenders rushing over grillwork
streaming down the bumpers in the
race to be the first to reach the ground.
Pure and virginal water
in a hurry to be mud.

CHOLESTEROL WATCHING

BY

VALERIE RIEF

She waited until he had stopped thrashing. 'When he had stilled and had floated face down in the water for five minutes, she dialed 911. "Please come quickly. Something's wrong with my husband. He's in the pool, and I can't get him out." She gave the address. She realized that she hadn't had to act to make her voice sound shaky. She ran outside and eased herself into the shallow end of the pool, going down the ladder. Frank's face was half-way in the strainer drain where floating leaves collected. Alice grabbed the back of his head by the thin hair, lifting his face up and out of the drain. God! There was no doubt in her mind now. His face was a dull gray-blue. His eyes were open but rolled up. The turkey was dead.

The rescue team, racing through the gate, saw a tiny, distraught woman trying to drag a two hundred twenty-five pound dead man from the water, her arms around his upper chest, pulling backwards. Their report would include this poignant scene.

They took over then, getting Frank on the pool coping in two seconds. They swarmed all over him, telling Alice to stay back. She felt a thrill of terror and despair when she saw them hook electrical leads to Frank's chest. She kept telling herself that nobody who had looked that bad could be brought back to life. She made a marvelous adjustment to her widowed status in such a short time.

Eventually, the ambulance pulled away with Frank's body. A policewoman wrote down Alice's statement of the facts: that Frank had only had one or two drinks much earlier in the evening and that Alice had been reading upstairs and had looked out to see Frank's body floating in the pool at ten o'clock. She wept softly as she tried to give her the information. The officer called Alice's brother who had said he'd be right over.

Alice went into her bathroom and locked the door. She took a large bath towel, stuffed it up against her face, and laughed

until tears pricked hot little spikes under her squeezed eyelids. "Oh Frank! You cold, dead bastard, there is some justice in this world, and I'll worry about the next world some other time. "

Her brother would be there in a minute, and after that, Alice knew, there would be several days of answering all the questions and accepting the all the sympathy that would be directed at her. Her biggest task now was to get through the funeral formalities in the most dignified manner possible. A steely conviction that she shouldn't say anything yet, probably not for a long time, really, galvanized her. It made her feel very much in charge. More than anything, no matter how much it bothered her, she must not tell what had happened earlier that night. She wouldn't forget, though. She'd never for get about it.

Frank had been preoccupied all day. He had gone to the early service at church. He almost always went at eleven o'clock because he thought he would make more business contacts, shake more hands, be recognized more frequently and by more of the people who counted at the later service. When he got home, he had changed his clothes and immediately fired up the mower, starting in on the back yard, a task he had been leaving to the lawn service, especially now that he could well afford it. Alice had brought him a huge glass of iced tea with plenty of lemon, just the way he liked it. He had told her he didn't want it, he was watching his caffeine intake; then he had said he'd get some water out of the hose. Alice asked him if he was suffering from brain fever or if this was just a manifestation of the bad uglies. He hadn't thought it was funny. He put the lawn mower away when the slope was half-way finished. He just stopped mowing and started cleaning the pool.

The day had continued that way. Frank flinging himself into manic exercises of house and yard maintenance while Alice alternately tried to ignore him and indulge him. At four o'clock she found him watching

CHOLESTEROL WATCHING (CONT.)

a tennis match in the family room. "Do you want to go out to that new place at the lake for Chinese food? Or, I could fix a salad and we could put those last two steaks on the grill." She was hoping he'd go for the Chinese; by this time the tension quivered in the air. Maybe getting out would break the spell.

"I'm too tired to go out. I'd have to change clothes. But don't fix a steak for me. I'm going to cut out red meat. This tennis match is interesting and I want to see it." He hadn't looked at her once during the exchange. "Do we have any chicken? I'm getting hungry."

Alice glared at the back of Frank's head and stuck her tongue out at him. Rummaging through the freezer, she came up with three boneless chicken breasts. She partially defrosted them in the microwave and then dumped them into a plastic bag with some teriyaki sauce. They would grill up ok and be enough for the ascetic in the other room. "By God, if it didn't fill him up, maybe he could eat a quart of ice cream and see what that would do for his damn cholesterol level. When had he decided to take health warnings seriously?" She mixed a salad, taking sips from a tiny glass of icy vodka as she worked.

She cooked the chicken on the vented grill which had been installed when she had had the kitchen remodeled two years ago after Frank's company won a huge contract with the Air Force. The house was nearing the perfection she and Frank had visualized twenty years ago when they bought the rambling, turn of the century farmhouse. The years they had invested in dogged dedication to the rehabilitation of that house could be seen in the painstaking preservation of most of the original hardwood floors and woodwork. A dry little smile creased her face momentarily as Alice thought about having lived in just the kitchen and living room for the first eighteen months of their home ownership. Frank used to laugh at night before he turned the light off as he asked. "Are we happy campers?"

Room by room, they had cleaned up and redone until they could finally think of the project as an accomplishment. Then, when

the contract with the Air Force had come through, Alice had cut back on her law practice, and they had added the pool, had the area from the road to the house landscaped, and built a huge garage behind the house.

Frank was standing at the counter picking tomatoes out of the salad. He had finally turned the TV off. "Let's go out by the pool. Now that the sun's down, it should be nice out there." He took the salad and the napkins and walked out on the deck. Alice followed with plates and forks.

"do you want tea tonight?"

"No, I'll have beer with my dinner." He went to the side of the deck where a covered bar held a sink. "Do you want one, Alice?"

"No," she answered. She wondered which no-no's he had chosen to eschew. So far, caffeine and red meat. Not alcohol. "Frank, is there anything else you want before I sit down?" But Frank was back in the ozone and didn't hear her.

They ate in silence for a while. Once Frank spoke, when he picked up the salt shaker. He murmured something like "ummph, no," to himself and put it down without using it.

Then, as he finished his food, he looked at Alice as if seeing her for the first time that day. "Alice, I'm moving out tomorrow. I am in love with a woman I met on the Air Force project. She's a member of the liaison team from Springfield. We've been working together for six months and we are deeply in love."

It was rehearsed. That was the first thing Alice thought. Then she wondered if he had rehearsed it with HER...the unnamed woman.

"Frank, what are you saying? You mean you're leaving me? We've been married for twenty-three years, we practically grew up together. We finally finished the house...and the contract...and, and..." She trailed off, not knowing what to say, wishing that she hadn't even had that one drink, an hour ago. "Wait. You say you're in LOVE with her? Who is this? What am I up against?"

"Her name is Kathy. Yes, yes, we are in love. I don't want to hurt you more now, Alice, but I don't see any other way to say

CHOLESTEROL WATCHING (CONT

this. I want to have a child with Kathy. Long ago, I accepted the fact that we could not have children, but as time wears on, I realize that it is becoming a matter of importance with me. Kathy would like to have my child."

"Oh, my GOD. You wretched hypocrite. You liar. You were no more interested in being a father than that rock over there. Are you telling me this woman is pregnant?"

"No. And I resent that."

"Frank, how many times did you refer to this house as your baby? How many times have I heard you say that this place is just the way you like it, removed and quiet, away from the noise of kids and cars? What are you thinking about, as if it weren't apparent."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I think you've got a bad case, a severe case even, of the middle age crazies. Yes, you hurt me, talking about children now. But that's all in the past. We settled that years ago. We've been happy. You've said more than once that it was karma that we wouldn't have children. Now are you going to tell me you just said all that for all those years for MY sake? Give me a break!"

"We do and say things when we're young that.....well, I don't know. Alice, the way I feel about Kathy is just so different, somehow. It makes me wonder if you and I ever really knew what love is all about."

"You jackass! I hate you and I cannot talk to you right now."

She grabbed the plates and walked, very deliberately, into the kitchen. In a fury, and terribly hurt, she cleaned the counter tops, wiping everything spotless. Occasionally, she looked out to see Frank gazing into the darkness, his face eerily illuminated by the lights on the sides of the pool. After a long time, he got up and dived in for his routine, ten laps.

Alice stepped to the window and watched him swim back and forth, back and forth, his stroke smooth and effortless. Despite Frank's size, he was a faultless swimmer. She couldn't understand when, suddenly,

Frank's smooth stroke stopped and he seemed to leap off the surface of the water. He grasped his middle in a rigid, spasmodic embrace. His big face showed his teeth bared and his eyes bulged in pain and horrible surprise. Alice knew he was having a heart attack. She knew that Frank would probably not live unless she helped him. For one instant, Frank's eyes locked on hers through the window. She just looked back.

"Goodbye, Frank," she mouthed.



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**WE WOULD ESPECIALLY LIKE TO
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